

Some Thoughts on Keisuke Yamaguchi's New Works

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Toyota Municipal Museum of Art held "Keisuke Yamaguchi – Canary" as one of the exhibitions commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the museum's founding. The artist submitted six new works for this exhibition. The painting of five of these was motivated by the Tohoku earthquake and nuclear power plant disaster in 2011. Keisuke Yamaguchi is an artist who responds to events in the world in which he lives in a sensitive manner, and who presents works of art as his way of comprehending them. Through interacting with such works, we are made to reflect anew on the conditions of the society around us, and we become aware of things we have not noticed before. This is a characteristic of Yamaguchi's work that also connects with the title of this exhibition.

Furthermore, Yamaguchi makes repeated use of specific shapes that worry him, that weigh on his mind. These shapes possess all manner of meanings, and lead his works to develop in diverse directions. This is something already apparent in his early works, with their natural-appearing forms and human-generated objects that blend in the creation of the work without differentiation of origin, as if they are permeating each other. This aspect has continued to characterize Yamaguchi's works, and is a key to deciphering their content.

In this essay, I have tried to clarify these characteristics found in Yamaguchi's work while focusing in particular on the new pieces he submitted for the "Keisuke Yamaguchi – Canary" exhibition. In doing so, what I have intended to survey as well, from his early works onward, is the artist's way of looking at such things as mythology, history, life, nature, and the society in which he lives.

The “Date Painting” of On Kawara and Cave Paintings

Yoko Nose

The “date paintings” that On Kawara (29,771 days) is perhaps best known for were begun on January 4, 1966, after his departure from Japan in 1959 and his settling permanently in New York City during 1964 and 1965, and he continued to produce them for nearly half a century. Made following the simple rule of that each day’s date had to be painted on that day, these richly ambiguous works raise all manner of profound questions without ever coming to a single solution. Although these “Date Painting” are often discussed in terms of their connection to the concurrent emerging of the conceptual art and minimal art of the time, in this article, I would like to trace back and reconsider these paintings in light of their perhaps unlikely relationship to prehistoric cave paintings. Because the fact of the matter is that cave paintings had an enormous influence on the creation of Kawara’s “date paintings”.

Though little is clear about Kawara’s activity from 1959 through the early sixties, during which he stayed in Mexico and later moved to New York, in 1963 he visited the Altamira cave paintings in Spain, and the following year he was producing creative work in earnest. In his drawing collection 1964 Paris-New York, one notes a sense of foresight that connects to his later work, and within that the influence of the prehistoric cave paintings is clearly present. By looking at the fundamental relationships between space, time, and humans and art, I will investigate the degree to which Kawara’s “Date Painting” were influenced by cave paintings, which were an original art that transcended history and language.